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Keeping Children Safe on the Internet

The Internet can be a valuable educational tool as well as provide hours of entertainment. Children can use the Internet for homework assistance or to research topics of interest. Unfortunately, the Internet can also be a dangerous place for children. It is up to parents to educate themselves and their children about the Internet and its potential dangers.

Benefits of the Internet

The Internet offers the following benefits:

- Contains many good sources of educational information
- Provides up-to-date news articles from around the globe
- Allows access to entertaining and educational games

Enables communication with friends and relatives through chat and e-mail

Dangers of the Internet

Parents need to be aware of the following potential Internet dangers:

- **Credibility.** There are no restrictions to what someone can post on a web site. Therefore, not all Internet sites are credible or contain accurate information. When using the Internet for homework assistance, be sure to teach your children to verify information using multiple sources.
- **Online stalkers or predators.** Unfortunately, there are individuals who use the Internet in a malicious way, or as a way to harass others. Some users will pose as children in order to gain the trust of younger users.
- **Unsolicited e-mail, or "spam."** These messages usually come from unknown senders and may contain inappropriate content or images or may try to solicit money or other personal information.
- **Questionable content.** It is very easy to access sites that contain sexually explicit, violent or other inappropriate materials. Even a simple online search can turn up a number of these sites.
- **Easy access to online shopping.** The Internet makes it easy to browse through auction or retail sites. With a credit card number, users can purchase goods and services with just a click of the mouse.

Viruses. Some Internet sites can cause viruses to be downloaded to your computer, resulting in lost information and other damage.

General Internet Safety Tips

If your children will be using the computer and the Internet, keep the following safety tips in mind:

- Learn about the Internet and be aware of both its benefits and risks. Talk to your children about the risks so that they can also be more informed users.
- Stay involved and informed about your child's Internet use. There are programs that you can install that can monitor computer activity or block access to certain Internet sites. You can also stay on top of computer use by placing the computer in a common area in your home.
- Set rules for Internet use. These rules may include limiting your children to certain Internet sites, restricting the use of chat rooms, setting aside certain times of the day for computer use and limiting the number of hours that can be spent online.
- Keep all e-mail accounts in your name and make sure that you have access to all accounts. Sharing an e-mail account among family members can be a good solution and can allow everyone to keep in touch with other relatives.
- Talk with your children about the dangers of chatting and e-mail. Insist that your children never give out personal information or schedule a face-to-face meeting with anyone they meet online.
- Establish rules for online shopping and purchases.

Teach your children how to exit uncomfortable situations if you allow them to use chat rooms. Also teach them to inform you about any questionable e-mail that they receive.

Resources for Parents

The following websites can help you to ensure that your family stays safe while online:

- www.staysafeonline.com
- www.netsmartz.org
- www.getnetwise.org

Call us for the support that you need. 1-888-290-4EAP (TDD: 1800-697-0353) or go to www.GuidanceResources.com. Agency ID: FEDSOURCE

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